



**One Hundred Ninth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20515**

September 7, 2005

The Honorable David M. Walker
Comptroller General of the United States
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Walker:

In the aftermath of the tragic events of September 11, 2001, the federal government was reorganized with the intent of better securing America against acts of terrorism. Many entities with homeland security responsibilities, including Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), were transferred to a newly created Department of Homeland Security. As the designated federal lead for preparing for, responding to, and recovering from catastrophic events – natural disasters and acts of terrorism – FEMA is responsible for providing planning and preparedness assistance to state and local governments, and for coordinating federal emergency management activities. The FEMA mission is carried out within the Department's Emergency Preparedness and Response directorate.

Hurricane Katrina was the first significant test of preparedness and response since the creation of the Department of Homeland Security. While the devastation visited upon New Orleans was natural, a series of articles published on June 23-27, 2002 in the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* appeared to forecast Hurricane Katrina, the consequent flooding that could kill thousands, and the large numbers of residents who would be left in the city in need of rescue. Despite this near prediction, the federal government did not appear prepared, nor did it appear to have the capacity to respond quickly. According to television and print accounts, federal government assistance was long delayed in arriving.

In light of this disaster, its impact on the people of the southeast, and to ensure the future adequacy and response of the federal government, we request that the Government Accountability Office undertake a comprehensive and independent assessment of the federal, state and local planning and response to Hurricane Katrina. We believe Congress has a responsibility to the American people to assess the lack of preparedness and the

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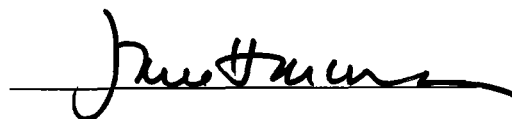
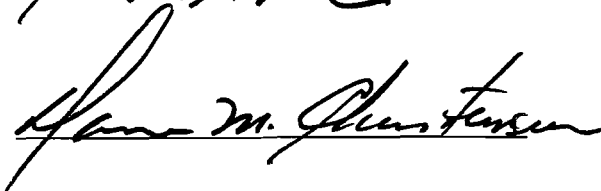
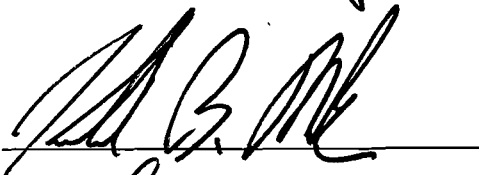
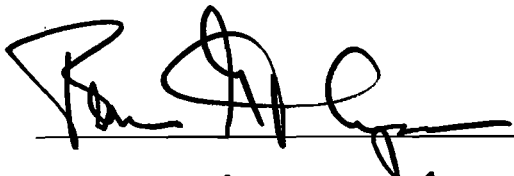
delayed response, and make recommendations that federal, state and local governments might take to ensure greater preparedness and response.

Specifically, we would appreciate your examining the following areas –

1. Whether under current law, the federal government could have declared a national emergency before, the day of and immediately after Hurricane Katrina hit land.
2. An examination of the challenges, gaps, and deficiencies in the federal, state, and local response to the hurricane in Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, and Florida.
3. An examination of how communications failures affected the response efforts.
4. An examination of FEMA's utilization and organization of first responders and medical teams from other jurisdictions, the provision of supplies to the affected areas, and the general coordination of response efforts.
5. An examination of what steps did the Department of Homeland Security take to pre-position response and recovery assets in the impacted areas.
6. An examination of the American Red Cross' coordination of volunteer efforts to the region.

We would appreciate your study of the abovementioned issues. If you have any questions, please contact Jessica Herrera-Flanigan, Democratic Staff Director at 202-226-2616.

Sincerely,



Bob Edwards

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